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VPR News

Laurance Rockefeller's Legacy Remembered in Vermont

Monday, 07/12/04 12am

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Steve Zind - Colchester, VT

(Host) When Laurence Rockefeller died last weekend at the age of 94, he was remembered as a philanthropist who used his influence and fortune to help establish and expand national parks from the Virgin Islands to Hawaii. But Vermonters don't have to look far to see Rockefeller's influence.

VPR's Steve Zind reports.

(Zind) Laurance Rockefeller's association with Vermont began in 1934, when he married his late wife, Mary French. French was the granddaughter of the nineteenth century conservationist, Vermonter Frederick Billings.

In his wife's ancestral home of Woodstock, Rockefeller put his fortune to work restoring buildings and buying land to protect it from development. He contributed to Woodstock's schools, the community's health center and the arts. He bought and refurbished the declining Woodstock Inn in the center of the village.

Rockefeller's Woodstock Foundation operates the Billings Farm and Museum and maintains Vermont's only national park. The Marsh Billings National Historical Park is on land donated by the Rockefellers. David Donath is president of the foundation. Donath says Rockefeller was interested in much more than picture postcard beauty.

(Donath) "His philosophy was that humans, to be healthy and happy and lead rich lives needed these things: needed recreation, needed a sense of recreation, needed a healthful environment. He kind of in many ways bridged the old conservationism of the early twentieth century, leading into the new environmentalism where we're talking about a holistically healthy way of living and way of building, developing and sustaining communities."

(Zind) Woodstock native historian Howard Coffin says there was a lot of grumbling among locals when Rockefeller first started buying property in town. But Coffin says when Rockefeller arrived much of natural and historic beauty of Woodstock was in danger of development.

(Coffin) "But he comes along and he keeps so much of that beautiful village in responsible ownership. It's a huge gift, I think."

(Zind) Coffin says Rockefeller was a personable but quiet man. David Donath says the Rockefellers enjoyed the neighborliness of small town New England. He says the couple spent most of every summer in Woodstock and had a wide circle of friends.

(Donath) "Two or three times a summer you'd get a knock on the door and it would be Mary and Laurance wanting to stop by and visit and see the kids and pet the dog."

(Zind) Donath says the Woodstock Foundation's \$40 million endowment will insure that Rockefeller's work in Vermont will be preserved for a long time to come.

For Vermont Public Radio, I'm Steve Zind.

VPR News

Negotiations Break Down Between UVM, Non-Teaching Staff

Tuesday, 07/19/11 7:34am

Negotiations have broken down between the University of Vermont and the union representing non-teaching staff members. The two sides deadlocked over wage issues and proposed changes to retiree health benefits.

Vermont Wins First Round In Yankee Legal Battle

Monday, 07/18/11 5:04pm and Tuesday, 07/19/11 6:34am

Morgenson To Speak About Financial Crisis

Tuesday, 07/19/11 7:50am

Reluctantly, Welch Would Support Senate Debt Ceiling Plan

Monday, 07/18/11 5:50pm

NPR News

Foreign Policy: The Feminine Realpolitik

Tuesday, 07/19/11 8:53am

A recent piece on why there is a lack of women in Washington from *Foreign Policy* has had pundits and politicians alike talking. Heather Hurlburt steps in to offer her criticism and set the record straight on the presence of women in the political think tank.

Housing Starts Gained In June

Tuesday, 07/19/11 8:40am

MUST-SEE VIDEO: Chihuahua Chases Armed Robbers Out Of California Shop

Tuesday, 07/19/11 8:05am

'Cut, Cap And Balance' Heads To House Vote

Tuesday, 07/19/11 7:44am

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